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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the conative domain in the acquisition of sustainable school achievement. The focus of the conative domain is to embrace the learner with an all-encompassing determination to achieve. It is set in motion by a clear and self-directed sense of purpose in an environment of challenge and cognitive dissonance. Counselors and educational leaders need to understand the correlation between the will to do and school performance. When learning is nurtured by the support of caring, responsive professionals, the desire to achieve is heightened. Thus, the affective/cognitive connection is buttressed to a level where students becomes empowered to reach beyond themselves. The power of the affective/cognitive connection is unleashed when school counselors and other educational professionals factor in the role of conation in the formula for school success. Through understanding the role of the learner's will, desire, and determination to achieve in an academic setting, educators can more clearly understand the significance of using their skills as change agents to activate student success. When viewed as an integral part of a sound educational plan for developing competent and caring young people, students will emerge from our educational institutions with a healthy sense of self, their abilities, and the world around them. (Author/TE)

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WELLNESS BEGINS WHEN THE CHILD COMES FIRST: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONATIVE DOMAIN AND THE SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the conative domain in the acquisition of sustainable school achievement. The focus of the conative domain is to embrace the learner with an all-encompassing determination to achieve. It is set in motion by a clear sense of purpose, while being propelled to achieve its goal by a self-directed drive of unshakable proportions, even when placed in an environment filled with challenge and cognitive dissonance. It is important for counselors and educational leaders to understand the correlation between the will to do and school performance. When learning is nurtured by the support of caring, responsive professionals, the desire to achieve is heightened. Thus, the affective/cognitive connection is buttressed to a level wherein a student becomes empowered to reach beyond himself. It is through the power of mentoring-type relationships that the learner can comprehend with new meaning the statement that one is "limited only by the size of his ideas and the degree of his dedication." The power of the affective/cognitive connection is unleashed when school counselors and other educational professionals factor in the role of conation in the formula for school success. It is here that students can sharpen their educational focus with a conative lens that says, "I can!" Through understanding the role of the learner's will, desire, and determination to achieve in the academic setting, educators can more clearly understand the significance of utilizing their skills as change agents to activate student success. When viewed as an integral part of a sound educational plan for developing competent and caring young people, students will emerge from our educational institutions with a healthy sense of self, their abilities, and the world around them.

WELLNESS BEGINS WHEN THE CHILD COMES FIRST: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONATIVE DOMAIN AND THE SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT PARADIGM

Cheryl R. Gholar, Sandra A. Givens, Mary M. McPherson, and Ernestine G. Riggs

As educational leaders continue their search for promising approaches to school improvement, restructuring, and reform, the role of the educator is becoming increasingly important as the architect for designing an academic landscape that will foster the development of the human side of the educational system, i.e. school climate, collegiality, teamwork, teacher/student recognition, high expectations, support, and character building. Environmental factors that affect people, productivity, and outcomes are the same factors that impact upon the quality of life within the school. When examined, the elements that comprise the human side of the system are often referred to as the "soft data" of schools. However, the impact of "soft data" on achievement, test scores, attendance, and dropout ratios is quite significant. The "soft" items are a precondition to the outcomes of the "hard" ones (M. Donald Thomas, 1989). One of the guiding principles of school reform is that all children can learn, given the proper environment so that students, when placed in schools and school systems, will be able to achieve to their fullest potential. Through educational partnerships and collaborative efforts, a community of learning can be established that will enable students to make a smooth transition from school into the mainstream of society. Schools that are caring and concerned places of learning become a positive force in a student's life (J. Patrick Mahon, 1991). Effective schools also become a viable part of the community. The human side of the system, when rich with resources and support services, can and will transform instructional programs (the performance side of the system) into a wealth of opportunities for student growth and development.

The human side of the system can have a lifelong influence on a child or adolescent's self-esteem. When we consider a young person's pyscho-social needs for inclusion, acceptance, recognition, self-expression, and usefulness, schools must address student needs as relevant to the life of the curriculum; otherwise, school becomes a rather impersonal place that can be perceived as unconnected and irrelevant. An effective curriculum should inspire as well as inform. It should connect student's new learning to learning from other disciplines as well as nonschool experiential learning. Thoughtful adults who view themselves as change agents and believe in the abilities of the young people in their charge, vitalize and enrich the core beliefs of their students regarding the almost unlimited possibilities related to life, education, and future goals. A solution-oriented curriculum is pivotal to the establishment of a culture for learning that will pulsate with high expectations and student achievement. "Teaching for learning for all" is a primary institutional mission for school systems throughout the country. As part of the ideology for reshaping schools, this notion will require the successful breaking down of the myriad of pyscho-social barriers to learning. When the desire to learn and achieve is internalized on the part of the student, school success can be easily nurtured by supportive counselors and teachers who foster excellence.

The purposeful desire to strive, and the determination to attempt to acquire knowledge or a skill, is critical to the success of student outcomes. The will to strive is referred to as "conation". Clearly, it is in the conative domain that the teacher's attempt to transmit knowledge becomes actualized through the individual student's will and/or drive to achieve. It is here that "learning" is transformed from the status of being just a moot question to the true acquisition of knowledge. Understanding the role of the conative domain in academic achievement is integral to strategic planning and the implementation of school improvement. Implications for achieving the goals and objectives of educational reform is in direct correlation to the development of the human side of the system, which is encapsulated in the conative

domain. If we take a moment to examine the ideology of conation at a primordal level, perhaps the following comparisons will somewhat highlight its role in learning. Think of a quantum unit of light. It is referred to as a photon. A quantum unit of electricity is known as an electron. A quantum unit of gravity is a graviton. If we use this same context to examine the conative domain and its relationship to learning; a quantum unit of the affective/cognitive connection is the essence of awareness that moves man into action. It is a significant underpinning of the learning process. It is that part of the educational framework that must be interdependently woven into the formula for school success.

The conative domain nurtures learning and moves educational strategies from a plurality of parts to a purposeful synergism that promotes the acquisition of high self-esteem and school success. The conative domain adds a new dimension to the other existing domains, namely the cognitive and affective. Much is known about the two aformentioned domains, but very little has been written about conation, which is unfortunate since, as previously stated, it is critical to the success of student achievement.

Conation is a derivative of the word conatus, which is defined as "a natural tendency, impulse or striving, used in Spinozism with reference to the inclination of a thing to persist in its own being." In *Webster's Third New International Unabridged Dictionary,* conative is defined as "the conscious drive to perform apparently volitional acts, with or without knowledge of the origin of the drive, distinguished from affection and cognition." *Good's Dictionary of Education* defines the conative domain as "striving or having the power to strive or struggle toward a goal which may be conscious or unconscious; descriptive of one of the three great divisions of the mind or soul (historically), namely, the will as contrasted with terms descriptive of the feeling (affective) or the power of knowing (cognitive)." See figure 1.

THE CONATIVE PARADIGM

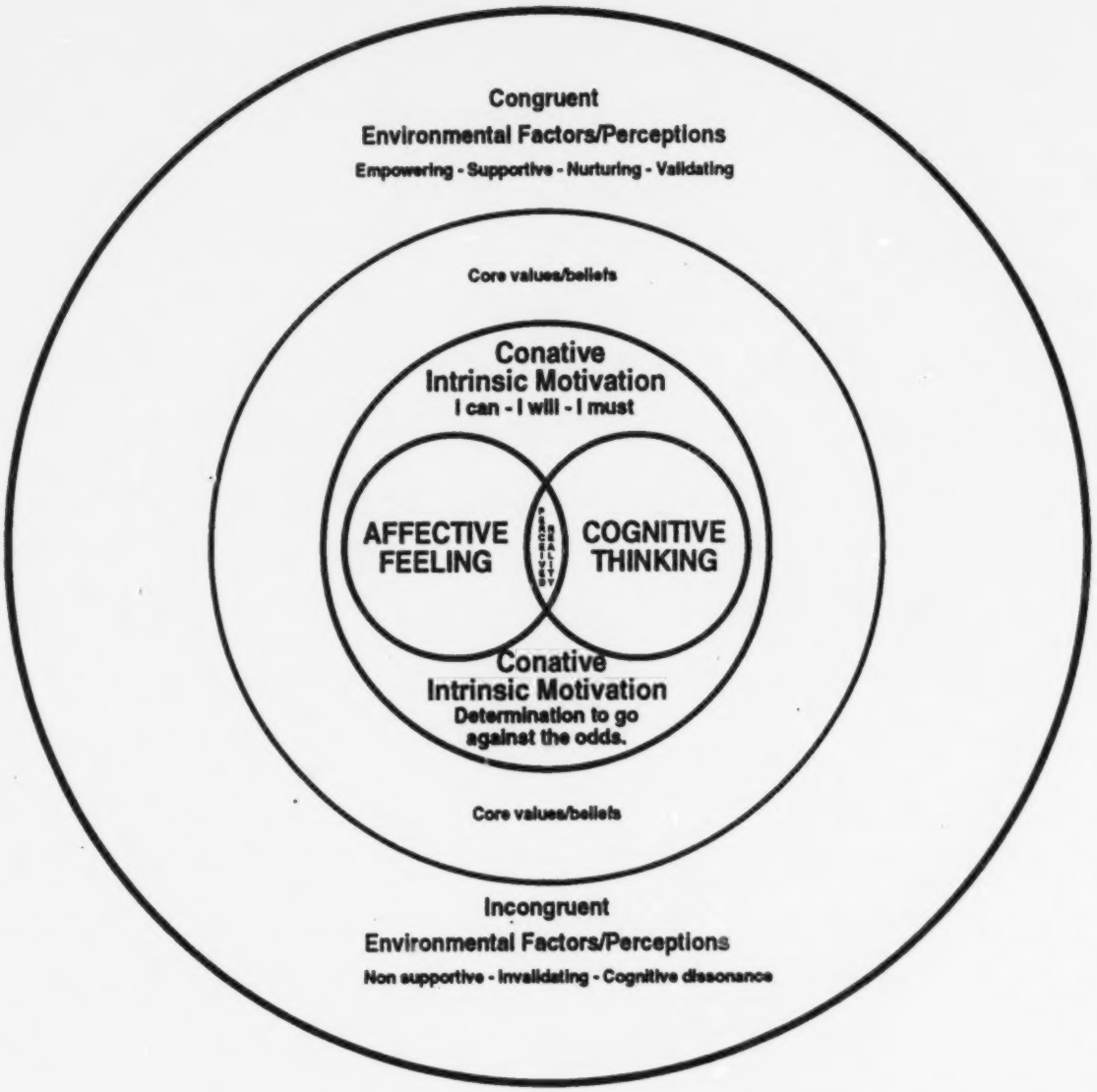

Figure 1

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In layman's terms, conation may be viewed as a synonym for motivation; however, it actually goes much further. Motivation generally involves an external force being imposed to affect a change internally; i.e. teacher (external force) initiates an instructional strategy that will motivate students to participate in the learning process. In the conative domain, the student initiates the motivation or that "drive" to perform and succeed; the will to strive towards a specific goal is embedded within the inner spirit of the individual.

Educational psychologists have long acknowledged the important connection between the affective and cognitive domains. Conation is the megaforce which has primarily been ignored. It is conation that provides that "I can, therefore, I will" determination in students. When a student feels a sense of self-confidence and self-determination, there also exists a sense of well-being or "wellness." This sense of well-being or wellness serves as a stepping stone; first to the belief in one's own abilities, second, to an increase in one's self-image and, finally, to that inner self-motivating drive that is able to survive due to its own will and determination. When this concept is applied in the academic arena (classroom), the result is sustainable school achievement. This is conation at its maximum potential.

Conation is what the little engine had in the story of "The Little Engine that Could." It is also that element that many fictional and nonfictional heroes had that attributed to their overcoming obstacles. Conation is that "secret weapon" that successful students possess and utilize, and that unsuccessful students possess, but have not yet learned how to utilize to their advantage. Even the very young have that internalized drive. The efforts of a child learning to walk and talk is a classic example of how the innate power of conation is present, even at this age. When toddlers are in the beginning stages of learning to walk, they are inspired by the constant praise and encouragement of adults. Regardless of the number of times the child falls in his/her attempts, he/she always gets up and tries again until those shaky, unsteady steps are transformed into ambulatory confidence. The adults provide the motivation (external force), but it is the conative drive (intrinsic force), that gets the child up and back on his feet time after time. This same concept carries over into the classroom. Without

nurturing, shaping, and directing the innate conative energy, students will have a difficult time in moving beyond the comfort zone of current levels of achievement.

When one compares the work and study habits of a "good" student to those of a "poor" student, the difference between motivation and conation is quite obvious. The "good student" only needs to be given the directions, instructions, or assignments, and he aggressively sets upon the task at hand and does not cease until it is completed. Neither does this student need to be constantly reminded or "goaded" into doing homework or extra assignments; no external pressure is necessary, for this student's conative drive is actively in force. In possessing conation, this student has that special essence that will sustain him through whatever challenges confront him. He will achieve with or without a "cheering section" of teachers, parents, peers, or other environmental factors.

Students are exposed to the concept of conation in their classrooms on a daily basis. The conative theme can be found in a variety of curriculum and subject areas, specifically in the literary genre. For example, students can experience the power of conation when they read such stories as *The Diary of Anne Frank*(Anne Frank, 1952). They find themselves vicariously enduring the fear and ordeals faced by Anne's family and friends, but also admiring these people's tenacious will to survive and live in the midst of cognitive dissonance. In *The Story of My Life* (Dell Publishing Co. 1985). students become consumed with Helen Keller's compelling drive, will, determination, and successful struggle to surmount what many would consider insurmountable obstacles. *The Jackie Robinson Story* (William Mann, 1950), which depicts how he fought discrimination and extreme prejudices to become America's first black major league baseball player, is yet another saga of pure inner drive, will, courage, and determination that inspires students of all ethnic and cultural heritages. These are just a few literary selections that reflect a prolific style and approach which touch young lives in a positive manner, as well as demonstrate the power of conation and how it can make a difference.

Alexander Graham Bell, during the turn of the century, described to his contemporaries, as best as he could, the psycho-dynamics of what happens when the focused energy of the

affective/cognitive connection moves into operation. Bell stated, "What this power is, I cannot say. All I know is that it exists...and it becomes available only when you are in that state of mind in which you know exactly what you want...and are fully determined not to quit until you get it."

When the skill of teaching is transformed into an art, it is then that educational leaders become change agents, building within our students the power to become fully functioning individuals, driven to succeed by an insatiable desire to actualize dreams and discover new possibilities. The reality of empowerment takes place when the elements of the affective, cognitive, and conative dimensions of learning are nurtured by reflective practitioners whose levels of educational concerns include a celebration of the integrity of human values. It is through the will, the desire, the determination, and the drive to achieve, that one moves beyond his present status. The following poem clearly describes what takes place when the cognitive and affective domains are embraced by the unrelenting, self-directed strength of the conative dimension of learning:

One ship moves east and another west
With the one same wind that blows
Tis the set of the sails and not the gales
That tells them the ways they go
Like the waves of the sea are the waves of fate
As we voyage along through life
Tis the set of the soul that decided our goal
And not the calm or the strife.

--Author Unknown

The conative domain empowers the learner with an all-encompassing determination to achieve. It is set in motion by a clear sense of purpose, while being propelled to achieve its goal by a self-directed drive of unshakable proportions, even when placed in an environment filled with challenge and cognitive dissonance. It is important for counselors and educational leaders

to understand the correlation between the will to do and school performance. When learning is nurtured by the support of caring, responsive professionals, the desire to achieve is heightened. Thus, the affective/cognitive connection is buttressed to a level wherein a student becomes empowered to reach beyond himself. It is through the power of mentoring-type relationships that the learner can comprehend with new meaning the statement that one is "limited only by the size of his ideas and the degree of his dedication." The power of the affective/cognitive connection is unleashed when school counselors and other educational professionals factor in the role of conation in the formula for school success. It is here that students can sharpen their educational focus with a conative lens that says, "I can." Through understanding the role of the learner's will, desire, and determination to achieve in the academic setting, educators can more clearly understand the significance of utilizing their skills as change agents to activate student success. When viewed as an integral part of a sound educational plan for developing competent and caring young people, students will emerge from our educational institutions with a healthy sense of self, their abilities, and the world around them.

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